

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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P R 040506Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7064

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

DEPT OF DEFENSE

CINCPAC

CINCPACREPPHIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 8864

DEFENSE FOR DIA ALSO

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS; PINS, RP

SUBJECT: MUSLIM DISSIDENCE IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

REF: MANILA 8256

BEGIN SUMMARY: FIGHTING HAS INCREASED IN SOUTHERN PHILS IN
PAST TWO WEEKS. MOST SERIOUS DEVELOPMENT IS IN SULU PROVINCE
WHERE INSURGENTS HAVE COMMENCED CAMPAIGN WHICH APPEARS DESIGNED

TO ELIMINATE SMALL POCKETS OF GOVT PRESENCE, AND WHICH AFP FEARS
MAY BE PRELUDE TO ATTACKS ON REMAINING GOVT MILITARY POSITIONS
IN SULUS. GOVT FORCES ELSEWHERE ARE MAKING LITTLE PROGRESS
AGAINST REBELS, WHO HAVE INCREASED THEIR ACTIVITIES IN COTABATO
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AND ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR PROVINCES. END SUMMARY.

1. PEACE AND ORDER SITUATION IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES HAS WORSENERD IN PAST TWO WEEKS WITH INCREASED FIGHTING, LARGELY INITIATED BY MUSLIM DISSIDENTS, IN COTABATO, ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR AND SULU PROVINCES. PHIL INTELLIGENCE COLONEL WHO BRIEFS DEFENSE ATTACHE REPORTED 83 INCIDENTS DURING PERIOD JULY 14 TO AUGUST 1, A NUMBER OF WHICH WERE RELATIVELY SERIOUS.

2. WHILE THERE STILL HIGH NUMBER OF INCIDENTS IN COTABATO PROVINCE. THESE SEEM NOW LARGELY CONFINED TO COASTAL AREAS NORTH AND SOUTH OF PROVINCE CAPITAL OF COTABATO CITY. HEAVIEST FIGHTING CONTINUES TO BE LOCATED IN LEBAK MUNICIPALITY WHERE ARMED FORCES OF PHILS (AFP) HAVE FIVE BATTALIONS WHICH REMAIN UNABLE TO DISLODGE LARGE, EMTRENCHED REBEL FORCE. ONE RELIABLE SOURCE TOLD CEBU CONSUL THAT AFP HAD LOST 50 KIA AND 126 WIA IN LEBAK UP TO JULY 9; FURTHER HEAVY FIGHTING SINCE THAT DATE HAS CAUSED MORE CASUALTIES WITHIN GOVT RANKS. SEVERAL REBEL ATTACKS ALSO OCCURRED IN VICINITY OF 4TH PHIL CONSTABULARY ZONE HEADQUARTERS IN PARANG, NORTH OF PROVINCE CAPITAL. ON JULY 29, TWO BARRIOS AND THE MUNICIPAL OFFICES OF COLUMBIO IN SOUTHEASTERN CORNER OF PROVINCE WERE RAIDED BY AN ESTIMATED 500 REBELS.

3. IN ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR, FIGHTING TOOK PLACE IN EASTERN, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN SECTIONS OF PROVINCE. MOST SERIOUS INCIDENT WAS ATTACK ON SMALL TOWN OF TUKURAN NEAR LANA DEL NORTE BORDER; AFP BRIEFER STATED THAT SOME MARANAO MUSLIMS FROM LANA DEL NORTE PROVINCES MAY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED. AN AMERICAN CATHOLIC PRIEST WAS INJURED IN ROAD AMBUSH IN THIS AREA ON JULY 26. SECTION OF NATIONAL HIGHWAY IN RURAL PART OF ZAMBOANGA CITY WAS REPORTED UNDER CONTROL OF REBELS.

4. MULTI-BATTALION ARMY AND MARINE OFFENSIVE IN NORTHERN PART OF BASILAN ISLAND, NOW THREE WEEKS OLD, APPEARS TO HAVE LOST STEAM. FEW INCIDENTS WERE REPORTED FOR THIS AREA DURING PAST TWO WEEKS. IN SOUTHERN BASILAN, HOWEVER, REBEL AMBUSH OF AN AFP PATROL KILLED 16 GOVT SOLDIERS WITH NO REBEL CASUALTIES REPORTED.

5. THERE WERE SCATTERED MINOR CLASHES IN ZAMBOANGA DEL NORTE, LANA DEL NORTE, BUKIDNON AND SOUTH COTABATO.

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THE MOST SERIOUS DEVELOPMENT IN RECENT WEEKS HAS BEEN GREATLY INCREASED OFFENSIVE ACTIVITIES BY MUSLIM TAUSUG REBELS IN SULU PROVINCE. WITH EXCEPTION PROVINCE CAPITAL AND SCATTERED AFP CAMPS, PROVINCE HAS BEEN LARGELY IN REBEL HANDS SINCE LATE 1972, AND FIGHTING HAS BEEN CONFINED TO OCCASIONAL HARRASSMENT OF GOVT UNITS IN DEFENSIVE POSITIONS. RECENTLY, HOWEVER, REBELS HAVE INCREASED ATTACKS ON ISOLATED GOVT OUTPOSTS MANNED BY MUSLIM PC AND ARMED CIVILIANS IN WHAT WOULD APPEAR TO BE EFFORT TO ELIMINATE

POCKETS OF GOVT PRESENCE. AFP BRIEFING OFFICER STATED GOP IS FEARFUL THAT RECENT FIGHTING MAY BE IN PREPARATION FOR ATTACKS ON MAJOR REMAINING GOVT POSITIONS AT JOLO CITY AIRPORT, PHIL MARINES CAMP SOUTH OF JOLO CITY, AND SMALL AIR AND NAVAL BASES ON TAWI-TAWI ISLAND. SAME OFFICER HAS CONCEDED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS THAT REBELS IN SULU COULD TAKE THESE AFP POSITIONS ALMOST AT WILL.

7 CURRENT SERIES OF ATTACKS BEGAN IN LATE JUNE WHEN REBELS CLEARED SMALL GROUP OF PRO-GOVT DEFENDERS FROM PATA ISLAND SOUTH OF JOLO. SUBSEQUENTLY, GROUP OF 30 PC AT CAMP ANDRES NEAR LUUK IN EASTERN JOLO WAS SURROUNDED BY REPORTED TWO THOUSAND REBELS WHO FIRED UPON BUT DID NOT ATTEMPT TO OVERRUN CAMP. DEFENDERS PRESUMABLY NEGOTIATED FREE PASSAGE IN RETURN FOR LEAVING ARMS AND VEHICLES BEHIND, AND THEY WERE ABLE TO WITHDRAW TO JOLO CITY ON JULY 21. PHIL AIR FORCE SUBSEQUENTLY RAZED CAMP AND BOMBARDED TOWN WITH AIRSTRIKES, INCLUDING NAPALM. SIMILAR ATTACKS BY REBEL GROUPS ARE TAKING PLACE AGAINST SMALL PC AND ARMED CIVILIAN DETACHMENTS AT TWO OTHER LOCATIONS ON JOLO ISLAND AND OM SIASI ISLAND TO SOUTH. HARRASSMENT OF PHIL MARINE COMPANY-SIZED ENCAMPMENTS ON JOLO ALSO OCCURRING. AFP RESPONSE TO INCREASED REBEL ATTACKS HAS BEEN LARGELY TO ATTACK REBEL CONCENTRATIONS BY AIR, AND PAF AIRSTRIKES HAVE OCCURRED ALMOST DAILY DURING PAST TWO WEEKS.

8. COMMENT: IT WOULD APPEAR THAT AFP MAY HAVE SERIOUS PROBLEMS IN DEFENDING ITS FORCES IN SULU FROM MAJOR REBEL ATTACKS. CONTINUING INSURGENT ACTIVITY ELSEWHERE IN MINDANAO MAKES SHIFTING OF BATTALIONS TO REINFORCE UNITS IN JOLO RISKY. WITH 17 OF 25 COMBAT-READY ARMY BATTALIONS ALREADY COMMITTED IN SOUTH, POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER REINFORCEMENT FROM OTHER AREAS OF PHILS WOULD ALSO SEEM LIMITED. TAUSUG REBELS IN SULU ARE KNOWN TO FAVOR SECESSION AS PRINCIPAL GOAL. THEIR RECENTLY INCREASED ACTIVITY MIGHT THEREFORE BE INTENDED TO MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR AFP EVENTUALLY TO

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UNDERTAKE A MAJOR OFFENSIVE IN SULU. WHETHER OR NOT THEY WILL ACTUALLY ATTACK PROVINCE CAPITAL OF JOLO, NOW SWELLED TO THREE TIMES ITS NORMAL SIZE BY EVACUEES, IS DIFFICULT TO JUDGE. IN DOING SO REBELS WOULD PROBABLY SUFFER HEAVY LOSSES THEMSELVES AS WELL AS RUN RISK OF SEVERE DAMAGE TO CIVILIAN LIFE AND PROPERTY IN CITY AS RESULT OF AFP DEFENSIVE EFFORTS.

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